

## Hong Kong Natural History Society

### April 2010 Report on Outing to Saikung West Country Park

Thirteen members and three guests made up a relaxed and friendly group for this hike. It was yet another grey and cloudy day unfortunately, and had rained overnight, but the morning was at least fine with a breeze, and the temperature, although cool for April, was ideal for walking.

We arrived at the starting point near Shui Long Wo on Sai Sha Road around 10.15am, and soon set off down the restricted road bordering Three Fathoms Cove that leads to Yung Shue O. This first hour was a nice easy flat walk with attractive views of the cove and hills beyond, despite the weather. All the greenery was very fresh and ..., well, green. After regrouping at the information board just outside the village, we continued and, skirting the village to the right, soon arrived at the start of the Cheung Sheung Country Trail. Despite my warnings that the next bit was not a stroll in the park like the first part had been, there were no drop-outs and off we set up Jacob's Ladder.



As long as you take this climb steadily and pace yourself, it really isn't too bad, and as predicted, it was better to be going up wet steps than down them. The whole group did really well, and everyone had gained the 300m elevation and all 558 steps, plus the uncountable slopes, to Au Mun and the plateau at the top by 12.25pm. Since the higher part of the plateau exposed you to a cold wind, we hunkered down on the slope for our lunch with Yung Shue O now looking like a toy village below. There was a

worrying five minutes or so when it began to drizzle but thankfully it came to nought, and we were able to finish our sandwiches (and small pieces of homemade cake), if not in comfort, then in good make-do camping style. Since the weather did not lend itself to lazing around on this lovely grassy plateau, we chose to shorten the lunch break and add in a visit to the Tofu Farm Fa about 15 minutes along the very wet and muddy trail. This campsite area at the old village of Cheung Sheung was busy with youngsters, and the small "shop" selling its fresh sweetened tofu and hot cha did good business.

We then had to backtrack a short distance before turning off to take the path, part of Section 3 of the Maclehose, that leads up the hill called Wa Mei Shan. As this path opened out onto the hilltops, the ground was drier. This section afforded the most wonderful views of Ngam Tau Sham, Ngau Yee Shek Shan, and even a little of Long Harbour to the east, and back to Three Fathoms Cove to the west. After descending the rocky slope of Wa Mei Shan with care, we arrived at a large junction where we parted company with the Maclehose and took the path down to the village of Pak Tam. About 3pm we took a coffee break on the steps to fortify

ourselves to face the mad dogs of Pak Tam. Although they sounded ferocious, the many dogs, which I believe are being trained as police dogs, were thankfully all in kennels / cages, but some of us still scurried past as quickly as possible. Since we had plenty of time, I took the group on a slight detour to see a spruced up Russian ~~tank~~ armoured personnel carrier, the model number of which I forgot to note, and which, bizarrely, sits just outside the Lady Macle hose Holiday Village with no explanation whatsoever as to its presence. Perhaps they are expecting trouble from the new drug rehabilitation centre for boys that is being built in the same area.

Back we went again past the dogs, who gave us the same welcome as before, onto the last leg of our hike, the Tsak Yue Wu Family Trail. Along this trail we were rewarded with the sight of a small group of Cattle Egrets sitting quietly in the trees. This was an especially wonderful sight since they were in breeding plumage, and the bright orange feathers of their heads and necks were puffed out looking quite spectacular.



Making the scene even more idyllic was the cattle family beneath them, just feet away from us by the path, with the cutest bambi-eyed ~~baby cow~~ calf. Eventually we had to push on, and left this path at the smart little village of Tsak Yue Wu, where we happened upon a little shack selling beers. A short walk along the road brought us to Pak Tam Chung and the end of our walk, with a few minutes to down the beers before getting on the bus.

Perhaps only one thing could have made this great day out even more perfect – more homemade cake.....

Report by Jan Campbell

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